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Security and Safety During Deployment

As part of the military community, chances are that you've heard the term "OPSEC", or operations security. Simply put, OPSEC means being careful about what is said and done in front of others in order to protect you, your family and your service members from those that can do harm. No matter how small some words and actions may seem, enemies of the military may be able to piece together certain information and learn something that could jeopardize you or your service member's safety.

You and your loved ones play many important roles before, during and after deployment — practicing operations and personal security is no exception. By understanding and following the guidelines below, you can contribute to mission readiness and ensure everyone's safety and security during deployment.

Operations Security

Be mindful of what you share about your service member's deployment — both in person and virtually. Some information regarding military capabilities, intentions, activities or limitations may be "critical information." By being a member of the military family, you may know some critical information details. While general details about your service member may seem insignificant, critical information can be used by an enemy to jeopardize Department of Defense personnel, operations and strategies. In an effort to keep our service members safe, make sure you and your loved ones — including children — avoid sharing the following details:

- **Specific dates:** Return or arrival dates can be dangerous in the hands of an enemy. If you are sharing dates over email or on social media, consider developing a "code" with your service member.
- **Location:** Avoid sharing details related to location — like where your service member is deployed or where you're living. Encourage everyone to disable mapping and location services on phones, computers and other devices.
- **Casualties:** Each branch of service has a procedure for notifying families about the casualty of a service member. If you receive information about a casualty in your service member's unit, never share those details on social media or on other online platforms.

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- **Unit specifics:** Your service member may share certain sensitive details about their unit in confidence including unit morale, personnel problems, capabilities, activities, force readiness or supply shortages. Avoid discussing these topics in public places, online or with members of the media.

Online Security

Safeguarding personal information is crucial to maintaining operations security. Revealing even the most basic details online like phone numbers, addresses or birthdays can make you vulnerable to enemies. Make sure you review and even consider changing certain settings on your social media and online accounts. It's easy, and worth it in the long-run.

- **Privacy settings:** Some blogs and many social media platforms will allow you to enable security settings that limit who is able to view what you post. Before using social media sites, understand your settings and limits on who can access this information, especially if you're discussing deployment.
- **Location settings:** Sharing photos, videos or geotags on your phone, computer or tablet can reveal personal details and exact locations. Before using any online platforms, applications or websites, get familiar with your account settings and only share location information with people you trust.
- **Third-party applications:** Be cautious when using third-party applications, such as online games, surveys or plug-ins for other websites. When you provide third-party applications with personal details, you risk losing control of where your information is shared and who it's shared with.
- **Protecting children:** Children, no matter how young, also play an important role in maintaining OPSEC. Talk to children and teenagers about the serious risks of sharing certain information online and discourage interactions with strangers through gaming consoles on social media or through applications. You can also take steps to monitor their online behavior, like setting up parental controls on gaming systems or on wireless devices.

Personal Security

Chances are you already take steps to ensure your personal safety, like asking a neighbor to pick up your mail or leaving a vehicle parked in the driveway when you're not home. But during deployment, you may want to pay particular attention to indicators that may advertise that your service member is deployed.

- **At home:** While public displays of support may be well intentioned — like yellow ribbons tied to posts or candles in the window — they can also blatantly show that a service member is gone. If you still want to have these patriotic symbols outside your home, be sure to keep them up regardless of deployment.
- **In conversations:** Unless speaking with family or friends, try not to mention that your service member is deployed. If anyone you don't know reaches out to you about your service member's deployment, do not volunteer any information until you know further details. If they claim to be an official military spokesperson or a member of the media, direct them to

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your nearest installation's local public affairs officer.

- **While traveling:** When traveling out of town, make arrangements for mail and newspapers to be postponed, get picked up by a friend or family member or get mail rerouted online through the U.S. Post Office. While you're away, stay alert and follow the buddy system, particularly at night. Should any issues arise, don't hesitate to contact the police.

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